

## A GAMUT OF ETIOLOGICAL<sup>1</sup> AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE IN THE DECALOGUE

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### Abstract

*The theology of divine retributive justice and the consequences of human sinfulness is evident in the Old Testament. Divine retribution depends on the method at a time, which can be visited upon an individual or collectively upon a group, for YHWH disciplines/punishes those he loves to re-direct them towards dignity. Punishing children for the sins of their parents raises a question of injustice. This article provides reasons for divine retribution and clarifies the theology of divine retributive justice as a method of judgement upon individuals and a collective group. Divine retributive justice as divine retribution relates to the system God uses to structure society and the way in which this system is interpreted and administered to people. The objective verdict is a corrective measure in which a wrongdoer maintains dignity and is treated fairly. The article concludes that divine retributive justice as discipline or blessing for those God loves, is applied to an individual or collectively to a group; thus, as God judges an individual; so does he judge people corporately.*

**Key words:** Divine retributive justice; Individual/corporate responsibility; Sin.

### Introduction

The theology of the consequences of sin can be justified on the premise of obedience and respect to YHWH, a lack of which will be punished, indicating the motive of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children from one generation to another as an act of justice. This can be argued in various ways, using various instruments of the law and the system of justice. “Sins of the Fathers” as intergenerational, emerges as a traceable theme from the Old Testament, the reason being that the first couple sinned (Gen 1-3:6) and the impact was intergenerational. Intergenerational sin indicates their individual sin and how it transferred onto their human progeny; this is what is considered as divine retributive justice as opposed to divine retribution. The sin of Adam and Eve was fundamental to

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<sup>1</sup> The etiologic nature of retributive justice provides reasons for the propagation and sustainability of sin. Meyers (2005:171) speaks of a strong punitive justice for disobedience across generations, what she refers to as “cross-generational accountability”, also called “transgenerational punishment” by Levinson (2008) and “transgenerational transfer of sin” by Miller (2009). Hence divine retributive justice is used interchangeably with retributive justice.

all human transgressions.<sup>2</sup> In this situation, the covenant context provides grounds for Africans to reason for sins of the fathers as intergenerational sin. This is why references are made in the Old Testament to how the consequences of sin are propagated. The Decalogue<sup>3</sup> clarifies why and how the sins of the fathers affects the children. All the same, the type of justice may depend on a wide range of acts committed or omitted before YHWH. Hence consequences are transferable in the form of curses and can be sustained in a society where God is not respected.

It is important to determine if the administration of justice creates an impression that retribution can only be visited upon an individual. For what reasons would YHWH show love or hatred for innocent created beings? In other words, why punish the innocent for the sins of others, the sins they know nothing about? This article will provide reasons and argue for divine retributive justice, and also shows how God is loving despite his manner of retribution in the Scripture. Again, the innocent ask why should we suffer for what others have done? (Why suffer for the sins of our fathers?) It could be that YHWH brought about intergenerational punishment of the innocent because their parents bow to other gods, indicating disrespect to him and allegiance to other gods (idolatry/polytheism). The command of YHWH is not to bow before other gods, not to make images of him, and not to equate him with other deities. This demonstrates that investigating the sins of the fathers as it relates to the beginning,<sup>4</sup> conceptualises sin as inherited from our human ancestors, and depicts the theology of original sin as the intergenerational transfer of sin. Certain traditional African communities are familiar with sins of the fathers being punished by YHWH in the form of consequences, which

<sup>2</sup> To disobey could be regarded as human choice, which is why De Beer (2014:73) clarifies that the human soul consists of three aspects: the intellect, reason and inner perfection, each involved in a specific kind of knowledge. God is involved in the act of saving humanity in future and helps them abstain from sin. Fitzpatrick (2009:703) also considers the transformation that resulted when humankind ate the forbidden fruit from the garden. This prevented them from attaining closeness with God, because their misdeed defined their new state of corruption and wantonness. Andrews (2011:231-232) clarifies this as the divine command-call that created a world that God saw as good. In the creation space, humans were considered the crown of all creation.

<sup>3</sup> Sins of the fathers appears in both contexts of the Decalogue, hence the appraisal of the Decalogue. Deut 5 is positioned in the older context of covenant and Ex 20 in the later context, as the covenant tradition is older than the holiness context. Duke (2015:347-348) refers to four texts where God visits the guilt of parents upon children, including Ex 34:6-7 and Num 14:18-19. In trying to position the contexts of the Decalogue, holiness theology supports the lateness of Exodus' record. Mtshiselwa (2016:135, 140) refers to earlier and later sources; the earlier sources were re-read and reused, and Lev 25:8-55, which is ascribed to Deuteronomistic and priestly writers, was reused in the holiness context. He asks, if the theme of deliverance from Egypt was indicated as captivity in Babylon, why was it repeated in the holiness context long after the liberation from exile? This implies its lateness as compared to Deuteronomic traditions.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps sin emanated from the pre-Torah revelation, where rebellion is said to have taken place within the earliest cosmic order: people sinned and were exiled (Gonzales 2012:374). Halloran (2012:185) describes original sin as present even prior to any human personal decision or choice. Patrick (2008:603) notes that the law began in Genesis within the socio-cultural and religious realms. Gen 2:4, 25-26, indicates that creation culminated with a marriage-like covenantal tie (Mal 2:14-16), the concept of a relationship with God. De Beer (2014:65-66) observes that God fashioned humans from the dust of the *אֲדָמָה* (ground), breathed life into them and made them living beings (Gen 2:7). "Man" was given a partner (Gen 2:21-23) to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth (1:28). Andrews (2011:231) says God called forth the created order and it came to be. The world was created with humans as the crown of God's work, given the benefit of living freedom within their world, with the will to decide what affects the other. It is here that humanity fell or sinned, and their decision led to the fallen nature that affects all humankind. Halloran (2012:185) equates this root of "original sin" to the historical rejection of God's love through human misbehaviour. Hence sin can neither be part of the original creation nor did it arise out of the creation. Instead it came to exist in a situation as a result of a choice, resolution or human judgement.

depicts what we may be more familiar with as intergenerational punishment, also referred to as retributive justice or divine retribution.

Among the reasons for divine retribution are, *image making* and *image worship*, as exemplified by the golden calf, when YHWH became jealous and executed his justice. Perhaps this is what led YHWH to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children for their violation of the covenant. According to Witte Jr. (2009:5), the phrase sins of the fathers appears in four texts, all within the Pentateuch and two in the Decalogue (Ex 20:5 and Deut 5:9), but the clear sense of the text relates to idolatry. Those who hate YHWH and continue to perpetuate sin, shall suffer the intergenerational transfer of punishment as divine retributive justice, hence calling for human dignity. It is not just the sins of the fathers that serves as the cause of divine retribution, but unfaithfulness to the covenant and the human inability to maintain holiness. The first family sinned (Gen 3:5-7) and thus transferred their punishment upon their descendants. Sin progressed from individual transgression to corporate responsibility, which informs the perception of divine retribution in the form of original sin. Miller (2009:57, 59) points to wrongdoing as evil, and its shame for traditional Africans, and to the impact of sin on human life and its consequences for the faith of the believing community. Israel's idolatry was not regarded as an individual sin but that of the community, just as they as a group agreed to be faithful. Similarly, God's people were expected to be holy just as YHWH is holy. Holiness is required as part of the solution to divine justice. In this era, bodily purity and ritual cleansing as in Lev 25-26 were emphasised. These practices of holiness were more clearly indicated in the second temple era and later applied in the church. Sins of the fathers<sup>5</sup> in the holiness context must have been re-emphasised by the priests to prepare God's people for the revival of temple worship and for the dignity of their society. Hence, retributive justice was practiced in the Old Testament.

### **Theology of retributive justice in the Old Testament**

On several occasions consequences of sin were transferred from one person to another, which are indications of retributive theology. The examples indicated below interrelate the sins of the fathers and the transference of consequences from the pre-exilic to the post-exilic era. Most of the instances had to do with important figures in the Old Testament like Achan, Eli and David, whose sins affected their children. Perhaps it is for this reason that, during the second temple era, the priests developed the holiness theology to draw the people close to God to avoid the transfer of consequences. Divine retributive justice is a subject which Levinson (2008:59) attends to when he discusses the lament of the exiles for the injustice of past generations and the judgement of the divine Judge. They feel they are suffering unjustly and proclaim the innocence of their generation while blaming the past sins of their fathers. They envision a repetitive catastrophe upon them in the future, and the possibility of dethroning their God by the presence of their idols and evil. This brings to mind a loving God, as an unjust Judge who punishes the innocent. Van Leeuwen (2011:134-135) designates sin<sup>6</sup> metaphorically as "guilt", which

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<sup>5</sup> Few commentators refer to sins of the fathers; it is not the command but its extension. This emphasis sends a message that affects the whole context and reiterates the lament of the exiles. The problem lies in the fact that most scholars neglect this issue. Yet it is relevant to African perception and other third world communities.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the metaphor of sin as a weight to be carried, with sin as a debt to be paid, drives the point home. By sinning, Adam and Eve incurred a debt to God, viz. death. Sinners are considered to have incurred a debt in

weighs a person down. Guilt can be seen as the magnitude or feeling of sin/shame. It can be personal self-recrimination or public castigation, a notion of “sin as guilt or debt” of the past that “weighs a person down” and can spread the shame/guilt to affect others.

It is worth mentioning that Ro (2011:410) says the text focuses on a very refined theological problem which emerged in the post-exilic period when Israel was called to obedience. The exile was a period of great painful purging like Sodom and Gomorrah or Noah’s flood, when God’s people suffered for their wrongdoing. God is believed to be responsible for certain outcomes or consequences of human disobedience. Zimran (2014:313-314) says disloyal kings were condemned to national defeat (2 Chron 14:9-14; 16:7-9; 20:1-30; 24). Equally, obedience to the covenant was rewarded with economic prosperity in the land (2 Chron 27:6). This is exemplified by the standard of “measure for measure” or “blessings and curses” from the idea of “cause and effect” that relates human actions and their consequences<sup>7</sup> as in the covenant theology. The Chronicler gave examples of incidents and punishments meted out as either by “blessing and curse” or by “measure for measure” (2 Chron 25). On account of “civil war” between Judah and Israel, it lacks any allusion either to cause-and-effect or the direct recompense principle. Although the Chronicler does not always adduce the doctrine of retribution, that is how direct recompense forms a recurrent motif in Ex 21, which balances sins and punishment and explains the clauses that link action and consequence upon humanity.

In the covenant context, mostly post-exilic, God dealt with fathers who were guilty of infidelity according to a pattern. First “sins of the fathers” is illustrated in the family of King David, thus Absalom’s noted consequences were possibly a result of David’s sin. I agree with Avioz (2013:346-348) that the punishment imposed on Absalom was the result of Nathan’s oracle in 2 Sam 12. Absalom is considered an instrument in God’s hands to punish David following the divine justice rule of punishing children for the sins of their fathers (Ex 34:7, Num 14:18, Lam 5:7). Furthermore, in the ancient treaty context of blessings and curses, there seems to be a divine intention to discipline both David<sup>8</sup> and Absalom.

The second pattern emerges with regards to Israel’s kings and priests. Smith (2013:17-19, 21-23) links Eli, Samuel, Saul and David as Israel’s leaders affected by sin (1 and 2 Samuel). Primarily, these are leaders/fathers! Three of them lost their dynastic hope as a result of wrongdoing, like Eli and his children, Hophni and Phinehas, whose disloyalty led to punishment. In Lev 7:31 and Deut 18:3, they were priests under their father Eli. They despised the offerings to the Lord, committed immorality with women

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some way. Sin then has a “cost”, and we, as it were, “pay for our mistakes”. Humankind fell down in its decisions right at the outset, which, in the end, led to tragic results. Among key biblical texts in Van Leeuwen’s historical and theological argument are Lev 25-26, Isa 40:1-2, and a number of texts from Proverbs, all of which together raise issues that became eschatological, especially in Jeremiah and Daniel.

<sup>7</sup> The war with the Edomites is one of the most prominent accounts in 2 Kgs 8:20-22. In this case, “Edom has been rebellious against Judah because Jehoram led the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray and made Judah wayward”. The doctrine of retribution reflected in this verse suggests that the sin adduced in v. 11 is intimately associated with the sentence described in vv. 13-14 and 16-17. Verse 11 depicts Jehoram not only as being personally idolatrous but also of leading the people away from the worship of YHWH.

<sup>8</sup> Walters (2015:94-95) observes that the first responsible step is owning up. He refers to David as an individual: I am a human being, my sin is *before me* (Ps 51:3), using the metaphor of space and place. Ps 51: 4 says “Against you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” He continues talking to God, admitting that surely he has wronged him, he, David, has committed *this evil*, the Holy One sees his sin. David refers to individual responsibility for his sin, but the consequences includes his family.

in the tabernacle of the Lord and blasphemed the Lord (Num 15:30-31). Whoever blasphemes, will be cut off (Lev 24:16), according to the blessings and curses in the ANET practices. Moreover, Smith (2013:22-23) finds that in 1 Samuel, the two sins that caused Eli's guilt were that he violated the prescribed worship order and that he pleased his sons over God (2:27-29). God punished his household, for his sons had brought curses on themselves and he did not rebuke them. In 1 Sam 2:30, the Lord says "...those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me will be lightly esteemed". The sin became a national and dynastic sin that led to more consequences.<sup>9</sup>

The third pattern emerges from Achan's story. Berman (2014:115-119) narrates a great challenge from the story of Joshua 7, although the text indicates that he acted alone, and describes the sin as a breach of law by Israel (7:1, 11). In the field of moral actions, collective responsibility is attributed to the whole of Israel. Evidently "corporate responsibility" existed in ancient Israel; primitive Israelites made no clear distinction between an individual and the social group. This supports the presupposition that both responsibilities co-existed in Israel. Certain scholars have adopted this basic approach that the corporate nature means the group is treated as a single related whole in the covenant and are treated as a single related whole in their punishment as well. Thus, the sin of Achan is an expression of collective responsibility, like "sins of the fathers" being visited upon the children. The Hebrew Bible refers to the notion of collective guilt directly or indirectly in Ex 20:5, Deut 5:9 as well as Lam 5:7, Jer 31 and Ezek 18, 20.

This seem contrary to the individual responsibility proposed by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Berman (2014:118) argues that a large group's sin did not lead to consequences for another group. Yet there are stories of individual disobedience and punishment of the wrong-doers (Lev 24:10-12, Num 15:32-35, 2 Sam 6:7). This is consistent with the law codes of the ancient Near East of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Laws of Hammurabi from the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE. These seem to sanction collective responsibility over individual responsibility. Zimran (2014:314) describes the parameters of the transgressions as having to create a link between the king and the people as corresponding with the delineation of Jehoram's sin. The appearance of Jehoram's brothers as a collective figure in 2 Chron 21:4 indicates the significance of the family<sup>10</sup> ties between the murderer and his victims. Throughout the biblical period,

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<sup>9</sup> According to Zimran (2014:308-310), Jehoram's death and burial are recounted in 2 Chron 21:19-20, with v. 19 depicting Jehoram's demise after an illness. "Asa slept with his fathers... and was buried in the grave that he had made for himself... a very great fire was made in his honour" (2 Chron 16:13-14). God later in Kings promises Zedekiah: "Thus says the Lord concerning you: You will die a peaceful death. 2 Kgs 8:24 reports: "He slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. In 2 Chron 21:20: "Jehoram ...was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the fathers". The account describes Jehoshaphat's death and burial in 2 Chron 21:1: "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the City of David", emphasising his connection to his ancestors. Verse 20 reveals his disconnection from the ruling house by means of the reference to the kings' tombs. Thereby he is portrayed as unfit for interment and thus eternally sundered from his own family and the royal house. The only exceptions to this practice are Jehoram's son, who also "followed the practices of the house of Ahab", and Amon, who "sacrificed to all the idols that his father Manasseh had made and worshipped them" (2 Chron 33:22).

<sup>10</sup> Members belong to a collective whole and pledge to protect one another and to ensure the security, stability, and sustenance of the family unit. This account reflects the conditions required for family membership. The punishment should be understood in the context of the promise to the Davidic dynastic. This is alluded to in other verses and explicitly in v. 7: "Nonetheless, the Lord refrained from destroying the House of David for the sake of the covenant between him and David; in accord with the promise to keep his descendants." The way in which he is buried, constitutes a punishment for his deeds.

brothers and sisters demonstrate common responsibility. This is derived from the notion of solidarity, where a person is not an individual. Similarly, in African theology, individualism has little or no room in communal living for the reason that human existence is for the benefit of the whole group.

Moreover, it is by the same covenant methods that ancient kings made their treaties binding on all, and blessings and curses were considered as reaching beyond the generation of the partakers. Berman (2014:118-119) looks to the vassal treaties of the ancient Near East, and explicitly rejects the notion of collective punishment for the sin of an individual. He said, this opposes the Late Bronze Age Hittite Ismerika Treaty; that “If within the land a single city commits an offence, you... shall defeat the city together with its men ... If within a city a single household (commits an offence), that household including its free men shall perish ... (If) a single man commits an offence; (he alone shall die)”. Fortunately, this treaty of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE sanctions collective punishment<sup>11</sup>, the way it is described in Joshua 7. Zimran (2014:318) observes the forms of dual punishment<sup>12</sup> from within and without (2 Sam 7:14-19). This ties the punishment closely to the sin, thus demonstrating that God judges based on the principle of “cause and effect”. In other words, divine retribution is congruent with the law of cause and effect, but it is sometimes meted out to a group as well.

Retributive justice is God justifying the actions of humanity by either blessing or cursing the person or those involved. It has now been established that God can visit a person’s sin upon their relations, either individually or corporately. This is the case because humans share their nature. In this research, sins of the fathers is not regarded as punishment transferred upon the children but a form of divine discipline, to show God’s love for his people. Besides, it is when parents and their children fail to respect their oath and keep their side of the agreement, that God disciplines them. Retributive justice is portrayed as existing in two phases, individual and group: God disciplines those he loves either as an individual or as a group. However, collective and individual discipline co-existed side-by-side throughout the Old Testament; it was not a linear retribution which

<sup>11</sup> Concerning individual or collective responsibility of a royal assassination, the vassal is warned. According to Berman (2014:318) the treaty does not require the entire city, let alone the entire people, to be punished for another person’s guilt. On that note, the story of Josh 7 details an account of collective punishment for the sin of an individual, stating that Achan actions endangered the entire camp. God called for the sacred goods to be purged, so that Israel may benefit again from YHWH’s divine fortified presence and blessings instead of retribution.

<sup>12</sup> The similarities between 2 Chron 21 and the divine pledge to David’s dynasty, with those between Jehoram’s punishment and the promise, bestow symbolic significance on his chastisement. Linguistically, rather than producing offspring from his own loins to ensure the continuation of the Davidic line, Jehoram is destined to lose the lineage. The form of his death thus directly reflects the conditions for membership of the royal family. It is possible to suffice with the link between deed and reward on the contrived linguistic level alone here. There was an agreement between Israel and YHWH. Hence, God’s discipline was not based on their involvement in idolatry alone; an improper response to the Sabbath law was regarded as infidelity too, making God jealous. In Exodus the Sabbath is regulated by the priestly ideology of holiness and individual sanctity (perhaps post-exilic and prior to the second temple). God took a day (24 hours) to rest after the creation; possibly a זָכָר (day) points people to their past and connects them to their future. Brueggemann (2001:68) describes the Sabbath shift from creation to the exodus as addressing a new community which differs entirely from Ex 20 to Deut 5. It was an established community that was willing to live according to Yahweh’s will. Biddle (2003:111) notes that labour was prohibited on the day but allowed for everyone in the family within the six days of the week; all were granted equal status on the seventh day, including slaves, visitors and animals. Thus personal/group acts are connected!

changed from collective to individual responsibility, as most commentators interpret Ezek 18:2 and Jer 31:29. Covenant and holiness theology in divine-human relationships also indicate certain consequences for violators right from the time of covenant stipulation.

### **Theology of consequences of sins of the fathers**

It is now popular to say the best of African living is community life; it can be considered a good life where people consider others, their feelings and their dignity; the reason being that a person's happiness depends on how that person relates with others. Consequences of sin can result in a form of justice like discipline or blessings on either a person or group. Orobator (2009:61) explains that in a traditional African context, sin is a reality with great consequences for both the perpetrator and the community. This means that life is a shared reality which is maintained through family lineage in a community. Sin started on an individual level in Eden (Gen 3:6), but its corporate nature that affected the progeny cannot be denied. Migliore (2014:159-160) underlines the fact that the Eden event is narrated as a portrayal of the goodness of creation and not the history of sin. Its condition and injustices emanate from its corporation. This view of individualism and collectivism is interwoven and prevalent in ancient Israel and the ANE context, making the African practice similar to the biblical culture of communality. In this study, I indicate that the conception of the sins of the fathers has comparable connections with most African practices, especially the West African/Nigerian context. Similar interpretations of the outcomes of sin in Africa are expounded by Erickson (2013:550-564) and some others, who state that the consequences range and depend on the divine judge.

- a. **Divine disfavour:** On more than one occasion, God hated his chosen people, writes Erickson (2013:550-553),<sup>13</sup> quoting Hos 9:15: "I hate them for their wrong-doing in Gilgal." Hate above means he distance himself from them, not valuing them as a result of their wrong-doing. Nel (2014:282-283) comments that sin leaves a mark on people and interrupts the relationship between God and his people. For most Africans, favour opens doors for blessings. There are various ways of settling cases of wrongdoing and of being guilty of what is forbidden. People use elders and families to dialogue to regain favour.
- b. **Guilt and shame:** It is honourable to bear a good name, as a sign of dignity and respect. Moral guilt and shame are due to iniquity before God. Guilt and shame affect relationships: they hid themselves in the garden for shame and guilt after eating the forbidden tree. According to Erickson (2013:552-553),<sup>14</sup> they were

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<sup>13</sup> "I will drive them from Zion and not any longer will there be love between us" (Jer 12:8). God hates the wicked: Ps 11:5, "he hates and dislikes wickedness". According to Prov 6:16-17 and Zech 8:17 the reason is that they first hated God and transgressed. Although he does not retaliate, he hates such behaviour, not the person or people. God's plan for dignity, honour, respect, love, trust and much more was replaced by fear, shame, guilt and seeking for hiding places (Gen 3:7-15, Isa 63:10, Lam 2:4-5). God's anger lasts for a moment and his favour has no end (Ps 30:5, Judg 2:14, Jer 10:24). Thus, he is a loving God who disciplines those he loves.

<sup>14</sup> Feelings of inadequacy appear, leaving the spoiler lacking any moral ground. While good is beautiful, sin is ugly and shameful to society. Humankind, the crown of God's creative acts, gifted with life and personhood, are to dominate and rule the earth (Gen 1:28-31).

subject to feelings of guilt for being wrong, for violating God's instructions (Lev 19). Nel (2014:282-283) agrees that sin leaves a sense of guilt and shame on humankind, and in some cases, it affects the society (Gen 26:10, Prov 30:10, Jer 2:3, 51:5). Guilt and shame become a scar.

- c. **Liability to be disciplined:** Humankind is liable to be punished. YHWH disciplined those he loved through exile and brought them back when they repented. Erickson (2013:554-557)<sup>15</sup> explains sin as accountable upon the sinner, with divine justice shown through certain punishment to correct the people. On most occasions, prophets warned the exiles against idolatry so as not to fall under God's wrath. Nel (2014:282) adds that sin<sup>16</sup> provokes jealousy and irritates God, leading to divine retribution. Where the Creator is not regarded by creatures, it indicates the violation of the relationship, and indignity to the Creator.
- d. **Sin, depravity and death:** Death is one obvious end result of sin,<sup>17</sup> which destroys a nation and separates people. Erickson (2013:557-560) observes that God forbade Adam and Eve, but their failure led to the entire human depravity (Gen 3:16-19). The covenant and the Decalogue were given to guard against spiritual death. Nel (2014:283) explains that sin has the power to affect or to influence towards corrupt behaviour of an entire generation (Gen 6:5-8). The prophets affirmed that Israel was nationally regarded as evil (Jer 5:1, Mic 7:2). The wisdom books describe the universality of sin in Ps 14 and Eccl 7:20.
- e. **Enslavement of the people:** There are consequences of sin; internally it enslaves the culprit and externally it damages the relationship with God and other people. Nel (2014:283) notes that the resultant guilt of Adam's sin affected the earth (Gen 3:17-19); instead of human happiness our ancestors brought calamity upon the innocent. Enslavement crept into the lineage, like Cain's murder of Abel and further lying to God in Gen 4; David taking Uriah's wife and planning to have him killed in 2 Sam 11, and Abraham repeatedly lying in Gen 12, 20 and 26:6-11.

<sup>15</sup> It may seem inappropriate for God to be hostile in the light of his loyal love and covenant faithfulness to his people. God's retributive justice is intended for rehabilitation and correction, which is why it is not punishment, but discipline (Gen 9:6) of individuals or corporate community. The crimes of the fathers became a propensity for children imitating their parents' failure, and such trends are likely to continue in the future, causing more indignity. In Isa 1:24, 61:2, 63:4, Jer 46:10, and Ezek 25:14, God's retributive dimensions are found. In Ps 94:1, God is an avenger, in Sodom and Gomorrah the community was affected, and in Gen 6:1ff only Noah and his family were saved. Divine retributive justice functions for individuals and also collectively (Ps 95:8-11). In Josh 7 Achan's family were affected by a person's sin, in Ps 119:71 God again disciplines those he loves.

<sup>16</sup> In 2 Sam 12:10-12 David learnt about the repercussions of his wrong-doing for his family (Amnon raped Tamar, Absalom killed Amnon to restore his sister's honour, later Absalom revolted against his father, David). Likewise, Orobator (2009:62) notes the experience of sin in Africa occurring within a wider context of life; sin embraces the world that is yet-to-be-born, the living, the living dead as well as the animals and plants in the world of nature.

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, parents' sins do not just leave a scar on future generations but stifles their progress and prevents healthy relationships. Unlike the Pelagian view, the Calvinists seems to be right, arguing that sin led to death, and that death was not created from the beginning, as Pelagius presumed. "They hid themselves and became separated from their God." Death here is not just physical murder, but also spiritual death, the killing of the dignity and the relationship that exists with YHWH by breaking the covenant, failing to show or receive mutual loyalty and respect.



The consequences of sin extend beyond family and leave a lasting scar of shame and guilt on members of a group. This becomes a stigma on those affected, including the past, present and future members of the family/clan. In many West African communities, ancestors are believed to be holy, and their family presents them as righteous and upright, even if such ancestors are known to have sinned and to have become a symbol of disgrace. They are revered as spiritual helpers before God. Positively this practice encourages dignity, but on the other hand, it stigmatises people and creates class differences like the younger white South African who were not born during the apartheid but are made to bear the pains in recent times. They are innocent of whatever their parents committed that was called the apartheid, but they are accused in our days. Maintaining dignity was part of African practices until colonialists declared such practices barbaric and immoral. Honour and shame practices were a human dignity practice in most African cultures.

The children grow up to respect the elders (male or female), the community respects their leaders and keep the law. The people are united under the umbrella of their culture and the centre grows stronger daily. Human inferiority is foreign to African cultures, except those that chose shame. Africans treat shame and defiance just as God punishes sin. The ideology is to discipline, correct and restore them to God. In this regard, there are two important contributions of this research, which has now addressed the problem of the research.

### **Etiology and motives of justice**

Punishment of the children emanates from failure to keep the covenant; it is not a form of judgement; it was stipulated as a response and part of the covenant. Hence, while other scholars see such punishment as visited upon the innocent, am of the opinion that YHWH only disciplines as a loving God, a form of correctional measure for his people. When parents reprimand their children, they do so in love with the aim of correction, not rejection. God's intention was to restore his people to himself, in the same way that a loving mother will. In this research, both corporate and individual responsibility are regarded as a form of discipline for sin. Both forms of responsibility existed together in biblical history. Any form of divine retribution is a response to sin, twofold in nature in terms of its consequences. Viewing the dual character of human responsibility – as both individual and simultaneously corporate – removes the confusion regarding justice around the idea of the sins of the fathers. There are still individual as well as collective repercussions to our actions, as immanent human depravity is personal and also collective. However, individual responsibility continues to be plausible in the light of incidents where retribution was separated from ancestors in Deut 24:16, Ezek 18 and Jer 31.

It is relevant for Africans to take note of these examples of ancestors. Israel repeatedly violated the existing agreement with their God, making the consequences to their transgressions lawful, prompting YHWH to enforce divine justice/retribution upon them to the third and fourth generation. In the same way, parents' misbehaviour in most African communities is believed to have great consequences for following generations. One can conclude that corruption (in Africa) may pile up future punishment for generations unborn, if we do not resolve to change. The guilt and shame or honour and dignity of an African/Nigerian will affect every relation in the family and clan. The

theology of “sins of the fathers upon the children” is thus regarded as significant in terms of an African perception of ancestral misbehaviour. It is against this background that “sins of the fathers” impedes community development. Gonzales (2012:385) points out that Moses’ intension was to inspire his readers by the good examples of faith and obedience portrayed in the patriarchal stories. Accordingly southern Kaduna (in Nigeria) cultures called for positive examples, especially by parents, to avoid punishment. Sins of the fathers could be defined as the violation of rights and the inability to meet the demands of the time, which then affects their children. In other words, sin is a violation of what is right and the adoption of what is wrong for a society. Our ancestral sin is believed to have affected the children when they fail to meet the community’s expectations in our times.

The second important aspect of the etiological nature of divine retribution is the motivation for the Sabbath in the meta-narratives (Deut 5 and Ex 20) which served as the broader context of the story behind the Decalogue. Deuteronomy is non-priestly and covenantal (placed as late pre-exilic to exilic), but Exodus is priestly (placed as late exilic to post-exilic). Deuteronomy used Israel’s exodus as the motivating factor, while Exodus used creation and the *imago Dei* as the Sabbath<sup>18</sup> motivation. The people were encouraged either to “remember” or to “observe” the Sabbath, in different contexts. The covenant people for instance were urged to observe the Sabbath (Deut 4:45) in the Deuteronomistic context, with the knowledge of the exodus supporting the motivation. Thus, the narrator(s) referred Israel to their liberation to indicate the significance of YHWH in their life, history and worship.

## Conclusion

It is imperative that the indictment of sin indicates a continuation of punishment directed at the one responsible as well as those related to the culprit. This indicates both group and individual retribution as divinely acceptable options. Although this contradicts the popular “individualistic” judgement where only the sinner is punished as in Gen 18:25-26, Jer 31:29f and Ezek 14:12-20. The issue is that at some points YHWH punishes individuals while in other instances he applies corporate or group retribution. In cultic sacrificial systems, an individual in a family or community is always regarded as one living entity, not as a self-sustainable independent personality. Ro (2011:412) confirms this with intergenerational transmission of punishment as divine in the Decalogue (Deut 5:9b-10 and Ex 20:5b-6). Meyer (2015:435) clarifies Lev 17-26 as an addition to the priestly text made by a later generation of priests. He regards Lev 1-16 as part of P,

<sup>18</sup> McConville (2002:128) affirms that the Sabbath was to be treated as a festival, observed with a strong connection between Israel’s creation and their deliverance from Egypt. Exodus informs the festival calendar, which guided the Jubilee (Lev 25). The celebration was in honour of their restoration, as a society. In Cooley’s (2014:189-191) words, the first six indications occurred in a structure describing YHWH’s mandate to his people while the seventh was a request of the Psalmist (19:8-11). The origin of the days is described through the rest ideology and the theology of cessation in Gen 1, where God used six days for work and the seventh day to rest. In Israel’s experience the seventh day was created as a day for the Lord, seemingly enacted by the priests’ theology to commemorate God’s creation in Exodus. The Torah influences the Sabbath. Cooley (2014:189-191) notes its composition as “septenary seventh-day-circle” which traces the beginning of the Sabbath calendar to Gen 1. The narrative calculated the calendar year indirectly to be 52 weeks of a seven-fold pattern, as in Ps 19. Although the Psalmist did not refer to the seventh day as the Sabbath day, the priests inserted it to fit their holiness theology, indicating holiness to God in Levitical and Priestly activities in the cosmos (Ps 19), and thus observing the Sabbath from sunrise to sunset.

indicating that the authors of P were acquainted with Lev 17-26, regarded it as post-exilic and saw a land theology in the text. Similarly, this ideology began from creation, where an unholy king in Egypt refused the request of a holy God, until he and his people faced the “ten plagues”. Then the holy God preserved his people through the Passover, and the people responded with their sacrifices<sup>19</sup> of respect, love and loyalty to YHWH. Again, these refer to group retribution but do not erase the fact that there were times when YHWH reprimanded individuals. The breaking of the laws of worship by one, affects all, and so are blessings accorded by the same principles.

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<sup>19</sup> They lived like an organism, one but with various parts functioning for a whole. Thus, during the monarchy in the early temple period, no one was allowed to enter the temple with iniquity in their heart or body, they had to be purified by the priests at the entrance of the temple to declare them holy. The reason being that YHWH hates sin and loves to see them relate to him in righteousness, thus group retribution is an applicable method of discipline.

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